

Horace Mann's Only Appearance on TV

William Van Til

Dicky O'Carson of the Tomorrow Show was being briefed on his forthcoming guests for the interview segment. He yawned and asked, "What this time?"

"It's on education, chief," said the head briefer. "We got some great guests lined up for you. For instance, Fertility Wright, who authored *The Public Schools: Madhouses or Jails?*"

"Best-seller list?" asked Dicky.

"Of course," said the head briefer. "New York Times, nonfiction Number Three. Published by Blatant and Squeezenickel, the publishing conglomerate which used to be a magazine and now owns IBM, General Motors, and U.S. Steel."

"I remember now," said Dicky. "The jacket shows a public school teacher knifing a student. Right?"

"That's right, Dicky," chorused the briefers. Dicky's familiarity with book jackets never ceased to amaze his staff.

"About that jacket, Dicky," said a sub-head briefer. "Be careful in holding it up. Low neckline." He demonstrated with generous gestures.

"On the schoolteacher knifing the kid?" asked Dicky incredulously. "I don't remember that. On the jacket I saw, the knifer was a typical middleclass public school teacher frump."

"I mean the back cover, Dicky. The picture of Fertility Wright. Better just flash it fast."

"Oh," said Dicky. "I guess I should have turned the book over. Where'd she get that name anyway?"

"We're trying to research it out," said the head briefer. "Her daddy was an anthropologist. Maybe it's got something to do with his work."

"Call Margaret at the American Museum of Natural History," suggested Dicky. Dicky never used last names. "She'll know. Slip me a note during a commercial. Who else?"

"Another great one, Dicky," said the head briefer. "Dr. Hans Strangelove, doctoral degrees from both the University of Nuremberg and Berkeley. Author of *What You Always Wanted to Know About Bombing Public Schools: A Handbook for Humanistic Revolutionaries*. He's the chairman of the Center for Violent Alternatives. He's offered to make a bomb on-camera."

"Good choice," said Dicky. "We need to give air time to intellectual leaders. Anybody else?"

There was an embarrassing silence which was finally broken by the head briefer. "Another great choice, Dicky. Horace Mann."

"And who in hell is Horace Mann?" asked Dicky O'Carson. "I never saw any jacket on him."

Each of the sub-head briefers waited for someone else to speak. The head briefer said reluctantly, "We don't have much on him, chief. We got him from a new agency, Heavenly Bodies Booking. A really creative outfit--they answer the phone with the blowing of a trumpet before a Mr. Gabriel gets on the line. They promised to send us a puffsheet on Horace Mann but they didn't. Sorry, chief."

"We'll get by," said Dicky O'Carson resignedly. "We always do somehow."

When the participants gathered for the Tomorrow Show, Horace Mann turned out to be an old-fashioned looking fellow in mid-nineteenth-century clothes. He carried 12 bulky volumes.

The interview with the education celebrities followed the part of the Tomorrow Show in which an elephant trainer had an elephant step on Dicky O'Carson. So Dicky was out of breath when he got back to his desk. He was glad to have Fertility Wright explain at length the brutalization of children in the public schools and to have Dr. Hans Strangelove's lengthy demonstration of how to make a bomb. The program was almost over when Dicky got around to Horace Mann.

"Horace," said Dicky, "I see you have some books with you." The audience roared with laughter for Dicky O'Carson was a famous wit.

"Sir," said Horace Mann, "it is my privilege to present you with my 12 annual reports as secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Education from 1837 to 1848. In them, I urge the absolute right to an education of every human being who comes into the world and the correlative duty of any government to see that the means of that education are provided for all. In fact, sir, as I point out in my tenth report, every state is morally bound to enact a code of laws legalizing and enforcing infanticide, or a code of laws establishing public schools!"

"You believe in compulsory public education?" asked Fertility Wright in amazement.

"I do," Mann added. "Through free universal public schooling, virtue will prevail over vice. Universal education will be the great equalizer of human conditions, the balance wheel of the social machinery, and the creator of undreamed wealth. Through public schools we will extirpate ignorance, violence, disease, poverty, crime, and intemperance. Indeed, madam, it may be that even modest dress will accompany the blessings of universal free public education."

"Reactionary rot!" roared Dr. Strangelove.

"Indeed, sir," said Horace Mann, "the reactionaries are those who oppose free universal public schooling. I refer to unenlightened factory owners, anti-republican snobbish intellectuals, proprietors of private schools, and selfish people from the wealthy classes. But the common man supports the common schools."

Dicky decided it was time for audience participation. A listener arose and went to a nearby mike. The member of the audience said, "Horace, I represent the common man. I think Fertility and Dr. Strangelove are both zombies. But, Horace, I don't think you quite understand modern times. Your public schools are in trouble. Somehow things have gotten fouled up. Now some of the unenlightened forces which you mentioned seem satisfied with ineffective public schools for the common man. And some of our brighter and most enlightened people are close to giving up on the public schools. Some of the common men have decided that the kind of public schools we have are not worth supporting. What do you say, Horace?"

"Keep the faith," said Horace Mann.

"I don't know," said the common man. "I just don't know."

"Achieving better public schooling is a difficult task in any era," said Horace Mann comfortingly.

Fertility Wright, Dr. Strangelove, and Dicky O'Carson all began talking at once. Pointing an admonitory forefinger at them, Horace Mann said, "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity."

After the show, Dicky O'Carson said to the head briefer, "No more celebrities from Heavenly Bodies Booking. That Horace Mann must be some kind of a nut."

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